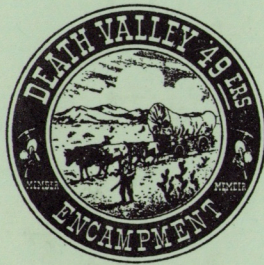


DEATH VALLEY '49ers ... The First Twenty Years

With reflections on the Death Valley Centennial



By ARDIS MANLY WALKER

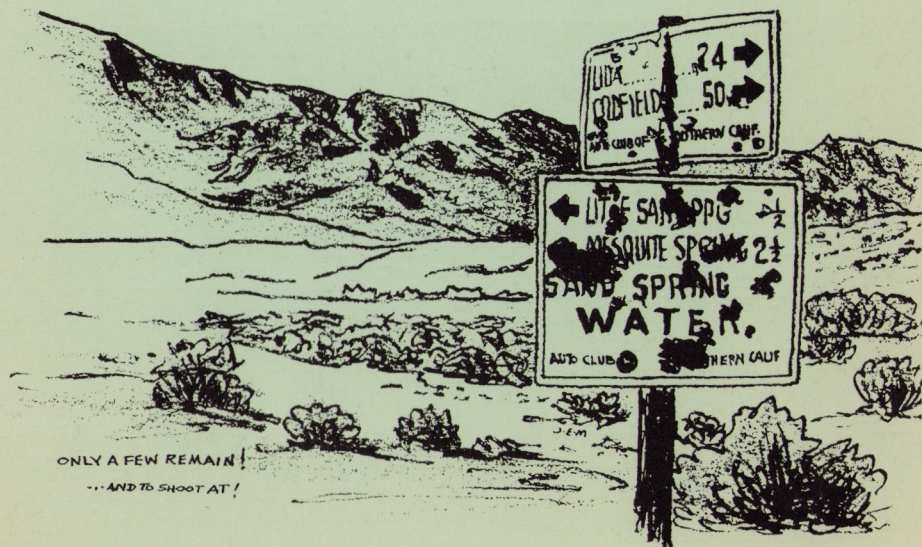
KEEPSAKE NO. 9

A Keepsake Published For
THE TWENTIETH ANNUAL ENCAMPMENT
DEATH VALLEY, CALIFORNIA
NOVEMBER 6 - 9, 1969

DEATH VALLEY '49ers PRESIDENTS

1949—Andy W. Noon*
1950, 51—John Anson Ford
1952—Ardis Manly Walker
1953—Paul Palmer*
1954—George W. Savage*
1955—Dr. Thomas Clements
1956—Mrs. Willard (Peg) Lewis
1957—L. Burr Belden
1958—Alex Krater
1959—H. Harold Ihrig
1960—Ralph Palmer Merritt*
1961—George H. Sturtevant
1962—Charles A. Scholl*
1963—Ralph A. Fear
1964—Arthur W. Walker
1965—Hugh Tolford
1966—Mrs. R. R. (Hazel) Henderson
1967—Leo S. Moore
1968—Edward P. Jones
1969—J. Emil Morhardt

*deceased.



DEATH VALLEY '49ers ... The First Twenty Years

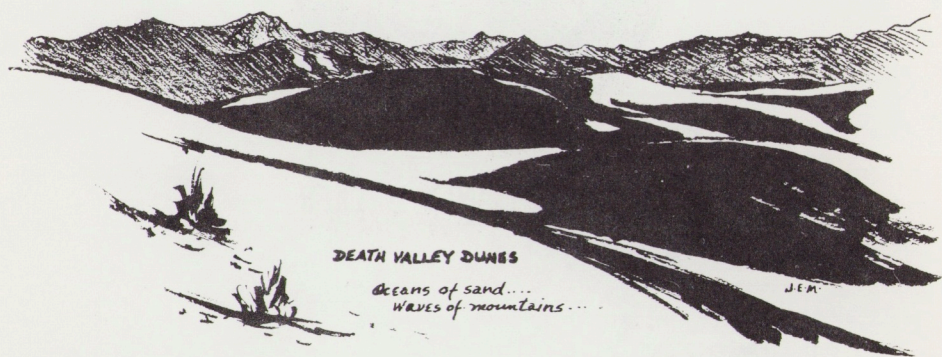
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All pen and ink sketches by Aim Morhardt.

Death Valley '49ers

It was Saturday evening December 3, 1949 in Desolation Canyon, Death Valley, California. The sun had disappeared behind the Panamint Range. In its wake a web of rays tipped the Funeral Range to the east and lighted a smoky haze of dust that hung above the canyon. Under the dust cloud people moved, thousands of them. They poured from the scene of the California Centennial Pageant to a sea of automobiles that spread across the desert floor from the canyon's mouth.

A flood of humanity estimated between 60,000 and 100,000 had come to Death Valley from all points of the compass and from all parts of the country. A woman correspondent from Pittsburgh, Pa. had written home to her paper her impression of the rendezvous. She said ". . . these pilgrims came down into the valley at the rate of 5,000 every hour; a caravan of such vast proportions that it is unlikely ever to be matched again.

"They camped on the desert; they camped in the folds of the canyon. They slept in their cars, trailers, wagons, in tents, in blankets laid on the cool hard earth; their tiny fires flickered all through the night as far as the eye could see.

"Some walked for many miles, leaving their broken down conveyances beside the road. All carried their own provisions and water, prepared for a mild duplication of the primitive existence which faced those 1849 pioneers whose ordeal they came to celebrate.

"Never was heard a discouraging word. Desert heat, desert cold, desert dust, desert thirst meant nothing."

The fantastic success of the pageant had evolved from a lot of planning and doing since a Saturday luncheon in November of 1948 at Ridgecrest, Calif. On that occasion delegates representing the counties of Inyo, San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Kern met to ponder the parts their communities would play in the observance of California's statehood centennial. Under the urgings of Death Valley National Monument Superintendent T. R. Goodwin and Randsburg publisher Paul B. Hubbard, the assembled delegates made what many considered a very wild decision; they were to attempt the staging of a major celebration in the forbidding reaches of Death Valley!

Their first act was to organize under the banner of Death Valley '49ers Inc. They named A. W. Noon, president; Maury L. Sorrells, vice-president; John Anson Ford, secretary; Arthur W. Walker, treasurer; Joseph Micciche, assistant secretary-treasurer; and George Baker, Charles A. Scholl, Otto K. Olson, Ardis M. Walker and Charles P. Salzer as additional members of the board.



1949 pageant scene in Desolation Canyon.

Initially the most imperative duty of the new organization was to raise funds which might be matched by the State Centennials Commission for the purpose of financing the project. This was accomplished by solicitation among corporations and individuals and by contributions from the boards of supervisors of the four counties involved.

Then it became necessary to round up a script worthy to express the heroism and romance of the Death Valley episode of gold rush days. Personnel was needed for casting, production and publicity. In many cases these jobs required people of understanding and dedication not readily found in professional ranks. In the long run most of the jobs were mastered by volunteers without pay.

Dr. C. B. S. Evans came up with a script magnificently depicting the trails and adventures of the Death Valley immigrants who blazed trails to Western destiny. Composers Ferde Grofe and Frank Allan Hubbell composed and arranged music of heroic mold overlaid with simple folk tunes of the pioneers. After several false starts to meet publicity needs, Ed Ainsworth of the Los Angeles Times filled the bill gratuitously and with incomparable effectiveness. He was ably assisted by Phil Townsend Hanna of the Automobile Club of Southern California.

The directors worried about their first contract. It called for erection of grandstands in Desolation Canyon, a place they had named as site for the pageant. This structure would seat 5,000 persons and there was fear that the show might play to empty seats

with a resultant waste of state and private funds. Soon increased interest in the affair, created by Ainsworth's fine publicity program, gave assurance that there should be at least a respectable showing of spectators in the grandstand.

A sensitive and talented narrator was needed to read the Evans script. Top actor James Stewart was approached first. He graciously agreed to donate his services. Then it was necessary to secure supporting talent to be the voices of the pioneers. Gail Russell, Anne Revere, Guy Madison, Parley Baer, Charles Victor, Joseph Granby, M'Liss McClure, Kathleen Freeman, Chill Wills, Edgar Buchanan and Olive Mae Branch took their places in the cast without charge to the '49ers. Other volunteers for the production included the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and the combined glee clubs of the University of Redlands under the direction of Erwin Ruff.

With growing public interest board members lost no time in creating a traffic committee which included members of the California Highway Patrol and the sheriff's departments of the four counties. By now the optimists were saying that there might possibly be an influx of as many as 15,000.

As the concluding days of preparation wore on it became apparent that all former guidelines must be tossed out the window. People were starting an earlier migration into Death Valley and in greater numbers than anyone had anticipated. At first this growing flood of traffic was hailed with a sense of relief by Lloyd Mitchell, Southern California manager for the California Centennials Commission, and Andy Noon, '49er president. They shared responsibility for spending close to \$80,000 in state and private funds as the cost of the pageant. They were glad of the assurance that enough people would be in attendance to make the investment worth-while.

Then, as I took an after dinner walk out onto one of the terraces of Furnace Creek Inn on the eve of the pageant, I was greeted by a sea of campfires that covered the valley floor and a stream of headlights extending along the highway as far north as eye could see. At first glance this sight was reassuring to one who had been appointed by the '49ers to serve with Lloyd Mitchell as co-chairman of production. The scene brought a gulp to my throat and tears to my eyes. The people had responded; we had created another gold rush, a rush to harvest the golden heritage of our pioneers.

In this moment of triumph I ran my eyes along the pattern of traffic; bulging both lanes of the highway, cars moved four abreast pushing the full blast of their headlights in one direction from north to south. They turned right at the Furnace Creek Inn

intersection and continued south toward Desolation Canyon. Then the full significance struck me; people and cars by the thousands were moving into the scene of the rehearsal scheduled for next morning and the pageant that was to follow that rehearsal! Unless something was done immediately there would be more people camped in Desolation Canyon by morning than could be moved out by show time. Clearly, our project faced a threat of disaster.

Fortunately, Sgt. J. B. McKernan and four deputies of Sheriff John Loustalot of Kern County were close by trying to relax from two days working in the valley with no place to sleep. I took them to the highway intersection and told McKernan to set up a road block and maintain it all night until we could determine what other measures were necessary. Then I passed along the lineup of waiting cars explaining our problem. There was not one word of complaint; the people had come to see a show.

Later, a park ranger located McKernan, explained that the blockade was against park regulations and ordered him to lift it. Mac's reply was, "I have my orders and that's the way it will stand until I am told differently."

By this time I had located Mitchell and we joined in the conversation. Our explanation relative to state and private investments at stake and the thousands of people who had come in good faith to view the endangered pageant caused the ranger to withdraw even though 'the book' might have directed otherwise.

From midnight until 2 a.m. Andy Noon and I visited people along the way from Furnace Creek to Desolation Canyon. They were deployed on both sides of the road all the way to the staging area; some asleep in cars, some stretched out in sleeping bags, some sipping coffee over small open fires and some softly strumming guitars and singing old time songs. After determining that the invasion of the pageant site had been stopped in time to save our show, we retired to the inn and to bed.

Next morning about sun-up Sergeant McKernan pounded on my door.

"You've got to put on two shows," he announced. "You just can't take care of all those people out there at one time; they are camped all the way from Trona to Death Valley and from here to Death Valley Junction!"

Assuring Mac that we could have but one show, I accompanied him back to the road block. The sleepy people were still waiting good naturedly. With the cast transported to their rehearsal area and a mounted posse deployed to keep the area clear, McKernan and his deputies retired to my quarters at the inn, hung their firearms on the bed posts and sank into the slumber of exhaustion. Later, a maid who came to make up the room retreated before a batter of snores and a vision of armaments.

With the road block raised the massed cars resumed their slow pouring into a temporary parking area provided by the National Park Service at the approach to the scene of the pageant.

At 2 p.m., the scheduled starting time, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra filled the arena with the first stirring measures of the special composition. At the same time a glance north toward Stovepipe Wells showed the highway to be almost clear of traffic. By the magic of patience and determination 30,000 to 60,000 persons had overflowed the grandstand and flooded the rocky slopes of the amphitheater. Thousands had turned back or were quietly enjoying campouts along the way.

For a reaction to what happened that day in Desolation Canyon it would be well to turn again to the words Florence Fisher Perry reported back to her paper in Pittsburgh. Under the spell of the pageant she wrote, "O Pioneers! If from the Great Beyond your spirits can return but once to the scene of your ultimate Ordeal, let it be today!

Flushed and bewildered by their success, the '49ers met in the litter of the aftermath. There were bills to be paid and loose ends to tuck away before writing finis to California's 100th anniversary of statehood. An audit showed them to be left with a few thousand dollars in unpaid bills. The loose ends seemed to extend like a



Ardis Walker, left, and Andy W. Noon brew midnight coffee while guarding the pageant road.

web to hundreds of people throughout California. The affair in Death Valley had proved too dynamic and widespread to be easily wrapped up and tucked away. During the meeting John Anson Ford remarked that the response had been so natural and enthusiastic as to warrant continuance of the organization for the purpose of sponsoring an annual open air event in Death Valley. So the decision was made to perpetuate an organization originally formed for a single performance.

It was comparatively quiet when the Death Valley '49er board of directors returned to Desolation Canyon a year later to the day. On this Dec. 3, 1950 no waves of music drifted back over the Funeral Range, and no dust cloud hovered over the site of centennial pageantry. On this occasion there was very little to record except that the board members had voted to return and rededicate the State Historical Marker that had been placed at the Furnace Creek junction of the highway the year before.

It was agreed that this gesture on the part of the '49ers would serve as a means of keeping alive a continuing program that was taking form in their minds. Joined by Chill Wills, western actor and singer who had been a member of the cast of 1949, they gathered around the monument for a short and informal program before retiring to the inn for a dinner meeting.

Mr. Ford had been elected president to succeed Mr. Noon of Kern County. Under his leadership plans were laid to sponsor an annual encampment in the great out of doors of Death Valley. This was in line with the primary purpose of the corporation as expressed in its constitution which read, "The primary purpose of the corporation is to work with the National Park Service, Department of Interior, United States of America, in conserving and making accessible to present and future generations of Americans for purposes of education and enjoyment, all the natural, scenic, scientific, historical and recreation facilities of the Death Valley region, *AND* to sponsor and promote such institutions and services as will contribute to public understanding of and appreciation for the miracles of creation and evolution as revealed in the desert and mountains of the Death Valley area."

Immediately after their 1950 ceremonial visit to Death Valley the directors began planning an encampment for the year 1951. It was agreed that this event should be kept as free from the carnival atmosphere and as close to the natural as possible. Consequently the format for this venture took such form as would foreshadow the nature of the many encampments which were to follow.

As the results of a series of meetings during the ensuing months the '49ers came up with plans for the 1951 encampment.

These included campfire programs featuring community sings and talks by old timers and historians covering the history and legend of the Death Valley region. Conducted tours depicting the natural beauty and geological formation of the area were introduced as a continuing pattern in encampment activities. John W. Hilton, fine desert artist of Twentynine Palms, was added to the board of directors. He used his contacts with many artists of the Southwest to put on the first of an outstanding series of western art shows. Floyd B. Evans, talented desert photographer of Pasadena, put together a showing of brilliant black and white prints of the desert region. Acting as co-chairmen, Hilton and Evans cooperated on a breakfast featuring artists and photographers of the west which proved so popular that, on subsequent occasions, separate breakfasts for artists and photographers were sell-outs. There was also to be an authors' breakfast under the chairmanship of Los Angeles County Librarian, John Henderson. It also won a permanent place on encampment programs.



*John Anson Ford shows centennial dodger to Joyce Brier Scharr.
Her great grandmother was Juliet Brier, heroine
of the 1849 party.*



CENTENNIAL DIRECTORS—Top row, left to right, W.W.R. Harriman, Lloyd Mitchell, Larry Shaw, Ardis Manly Walker, Joseph Micciche. Bottom row, Arthur M. Walker, Otto K. Olsen, President Andy W. Noon, Maury Sorrells.



O.W. Moon
at the desk

Larry Olsen

Lois D. Mitchell

John Brown Ford

Mary Soules

and others

Johnnie

Serge Walker

Andrew M. Walker

At the 1953 encampment a burro-flapjack contest was sponsored at the suggestion of desert rat, Harry Oliver. It was an instant hit that has become a popular feature throughout the years. Square dancing was introduced as a permanent part of the program by Bruce Morgan of Lone Pine. An exhibit of minerals and pioneer weapons and Sunday morning sunrise services for Protestants and Catholics rounded out the schedule of events.

Again Ed Ainsworth and Phil Hanna handled the publicity; this time with the able assistance of George Sturtevant of Trona. The result was a turnout of 5,000 persons. As yet the deficit incurred during the 1949 Centennial Pageant had not been paid off completely so that even the ministers who came to conduct the sunrise services had to pay their own expenses.

From the very beginning it was felt that Death Valley National Monument needed a museum if its historical and geological features were to be properly understood and enjoyed by the increasing numbers of visitors. With such a museum a prime objective, a \$100 life membership was created as a means of financing the project.

With Ralph Palmer Merritt's election to the board of directors he laid a new approach to this problem before its members. Merritt outlined a three-way arrangement whereby the United States Borax & Chemical Co. might donate a site to the State of California whereon the State Parks and Recreation Department might build a museum which might then be turned over to the National Park Service for operation. Within eight years this dream became a reality, largely through the dedicated services of Merritt, John Anson Ford and Senator Charles Brown of Shoshone who held the legislative seniority and power to see a finance bill enacted. During the maneuvering in Sacramento Arthur Walker of San Bernardino also played an important role.

These men with the support of other board members really performed a miracle in creating a museum for Death Valley along the lines laid down by Merritt. Their success was doubly effective in that the National Parks Service found it both possible and necessary to match the state funds so that a complete visitors' center might be included in the construction plans. By encampment time of 1960 the museum complex was ready for dedication. Appropriately enough, this year also marked the presidency of Ralph Merritt who was proud indeed to inaugurate dedicatory proceedings at which representatives of state and national government and the United States Borax & Chemical Co. proudly joined in celebration with the Death Valley '49ers.

These facilities have added a great deal to enjoyment of succeeding encampments and made possible badly needed expansion of the invitational and open art shows.



Frank Doty presents Supt. T. R. Goodwin with gun carried through Death Valley in 1849 by his grandfather, Ed Doty of the Jayhawkers.



Contestant in the 1953 burro-flapjack contest.

While the museum dream approached reality the '49ers worked to produce a series of publications on the history, geology and biology of the region. This program, under the chairmanship of L. Burr Belden of San Bernadino, has produced *The Geological Story of Death Valley* by Dr. Thomas Clements; *Symbols of Destiny* by Ardis Manly Walker; *Death Valley Tales* by 10 western authors; *Goodbye, Death Valley!* by L. Burr Belden; *A Naturalist's Death Valley* by Dr. Edmund C. Yeager; *Camels and Surveyors in Death Valley* by Dr. Arthur Woodward.

A feature of the twentieth anniversary of the '49ers is the publication of *Fifty Years in Death Valley* by the late Harry P. Gower who made much history and observed much more during the many years of his active life spent in the region.

In addition to the above items the '49ers have published several keepsakes which have been distributed to members at various encampments and at the dedication of various points of historical interest over the years. All of the publications have become treasured collector's items as has the sheet music "The '49er Song" by John Hilton and a record "Desert Magic" of songs composed and sung by J. Emil Morhardt, this year's president of the Death Valley '49ers. A new record "Sagebrush Trails", desert songs written and recorded by Morhardt, has been added to the publications of the Death Valley '49ers.

Throughout the years the '49ers responded to many and varied opportunities to serve in their chosen sphere. They were represented back in 1953 by their president George Savage, Superintendent T. R. Goodwin of Death Valley National Monument, Ted Ogsden, Charles Scholl, Mrs. Willard Lewis and John Hilton when the tired bones of Death Valley Scotty were laid to rest in a rocky grave below a redwood cross on a hill above his world-famous desert castle. Hilton sang his requiem on this solemn occasion. Mrs. Randall (Cyria) Henderson designed the bronze memorial plaque, which marks his grave.

The '49ers also sponsored a special dedication on Nov. 7 of 1963. On that occasion they held special services at Crowley Point on the road between Death Valley and Olancha. A beautiful monument donated by Major and Mrs. Robert Edwards was dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Fr. John J. Crowley who had devoted most of his life to the people of the eastern California desert region.

The services performed by the Death Valley '49ers have been never-ending. They have required the interests and talents of a broad cross-section of people of differing backgrounds and varying skills. As needs have arisen and men to meet them have appeared, new members have been elected to the board of directors in in-



George W. Savage opens a Sunday sunrise service.

creasing numbers. In all instances these directors have served without compensation and at their own expense. Many of them have taken out life memberships and all of them have maintained paid up memberships.

Just as pioneer men and women shared in their great adventures, so the directors and their families have made the modern '49er program a matter of family concern. Wives of the directors attend all meetings and serve as a general information and hospitality committee at each encampment. Without these women the program of the '49ers could never have reached its present level of success.

With increasing duties to be delegated, the '49er by-laws were amended to create a board of advisory directors. To this board people who have shown outstanding interest and talents geared to the '49er program have been elected from time to time. These advisory directors also form a manpower pool from which individuals are selected to fill vacancies on the board of directors as they occur. Thus many new directors and new ideas have come to the Death Valley '49ers over the past 20 years.

Through such channels, hikes to Telescope Peak, horseback trail rides to the encampments and fiddler's contests have been added to the annual activities. Similarly, two new breakfasts have been included in the 20th annual encampment program.

These will include an historical breakfast at Stove Pipe Wells Village and a hootenany breakfast at Furnace Creek Ranch on Friday morning, Nov. 7. It is hoped that they will serve the dual purpose of catering to wider interests and taking the pressure off of other breakfasts which have been playing to standing room only crowds.

Other changes have evolved over the years and other dreams continue to unfold. A committee under chairman Paul Gruendyke now works at recording on tape the living memories of veterans of Death Valley days. Another committee under Don Meadows searches out ways and means of erecting a special building in Death Valley where '49ers can enjoy a headquarters and where '49er memorabilia and art may be permanently stored and displayed.

It is through the channels of service of the Death Valley '49ers that the living significance of regional tradition has been projected into the waning years of the 20th century. In '49er archives and activities the lives and adventures of the Jayhawkers, the Bugsmashers, William L. Manly, John Rogers, heroic Juliet Brier and the many others of the first Death Valley contingent have been preserved and enjoyed.

Later pioneers of the mining era also live again for us at our campfires and in our publications. These include "Shorty" Harris, Aaron Winters of "She burns green! Rosie by God, we're rich!" fame, "Borax" Smith, William T. Coleman who doubled as Death Valley pioneer and San Francisco vigilante, John and Dennis Searles and J. W. S. Perry who designed 20-mule wagons for Coleman.

Then there are those whose careers spanned the years into our own era; Death Valley Scotty, Bill Keys, Harry Gower, Seldom Seen Slim, Senator Charles Brown of Shoshone and Shoshone Johnnie, Shorty Borden, Carl Mengel and Pete Aguerberry.

Fortunately we still have with us men who were in at the making of Death Valley history. Chief among those who move among us and give of themselves each year are Capt. Ray Gibson who pioneered as railroad station agent and long-line skinner; Horace M. Albright who saw to the creation of Death Valley National Monument while he served as Director of the National Park Service; and Henry Hellmers who went to work for "Borax" Smith as a young graduate chemist.

Modern '49ers carry on the objective of preserving the tradition inherited from all of these people, living and dead. The program is as broad and enduring as history. Who can guess at the unfoldments of the future? It is safe to say that '49ers of the next era will tell more stories and sing more songs in praise of the good old days and the beauties of Tomesha, Land of Fire, in the Valley whose name is Death.



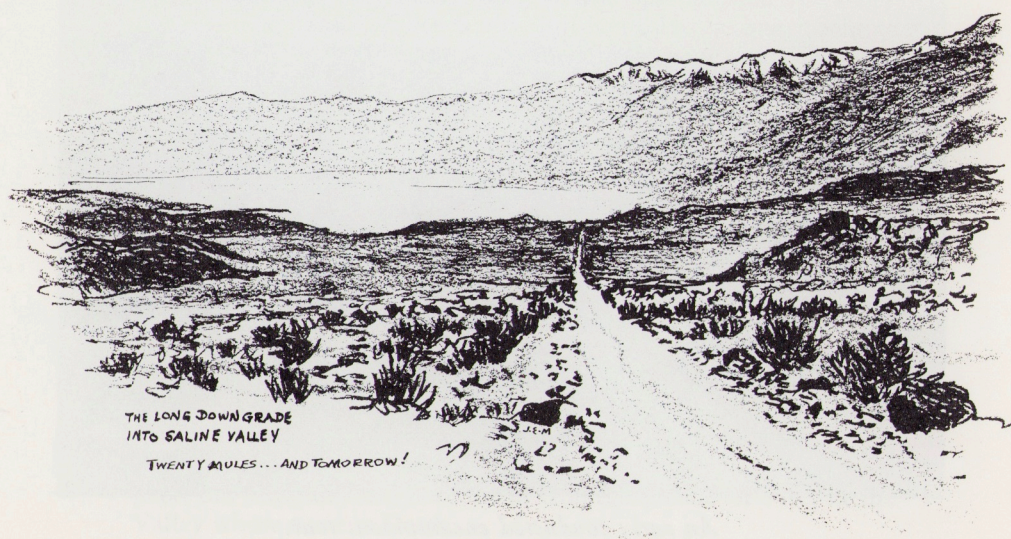
John Anson Ford and a young visitor at the first art show in 1951.



An early conducted encampment tour.



Celebration planners are, left to right, Montie Montana, Eugene Biscailuz, Ruth MacKenzie, and David Malloy.





*Ardis Manly Walker speaks at 1950 rededication
of state monument at Furnace Creek.*



*1849er descendents. Ardis Manly Walker at left, then Lydia Wade
Hunter, Elva Hunter Ward, Annie Wade Lowe, Lydia A. Hunter*

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DEATH VALLEY 49ER KEEPSAKE PUBLICATIONS

1. THE WADE STORY, 1957
BY L. BURR BELDEN
2. DEATH VALLEY, ITS MUSEUM AND VISITOR CENTER,
1960
BY HORACE M. ALBRIGHT
3. FREEMAN JUNCTION, 1961
BY ARDIS MANLY WALKER
4. SEARLES LAKE BORAX, 1962
BY L. BURR BELDEN AND ARDIS MANLY WALKER
5. OLD HARMONY BORAX, 1962
BY NICHOLAS KOCKLER
6. BALLARAT, 1963
BY PAUL B. HUBBARD
7. RALPH PALMER MERRITT, 1964
BY ARDIS MANLY WALKER
8. OLD STOVEPIPE WELLS, 1968
BY L. BURR BELDEN
9. DEATH VALLEY '49ERS, THE FIRST 20 YEARS, 1969
BY ARDIS MANLY WALKER

